

Among The Hills

Clayton

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR:

Pen Pictures of Farm Life.

PRICE, 75 CENTS.

J. W. RANDOLPH & ENGLISH, Publishers,

RICHMOND, VA.

COMMENDATIONS.

"His picture of a Virginia farm-house and its surroundings is perfect. The inspiration of all he sings is pure."—*Richmond State.*

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"The author of these poems is a man of thought and culture, who writes with a genuine love of nature, and a fine mastery of the English language. The descriptions of Virginia farm life are characterized by great fidelity and by a simplicity of diction which suggests that the author has modelled his style after that of one of the most elegant and pleasing of all our English poets—the author of the 'Traveler' and 'The Deserted Village.'"—*Central Presbyterian.*

AMONG THE HILLS:

OR

Scenes in Piedmont Virginia

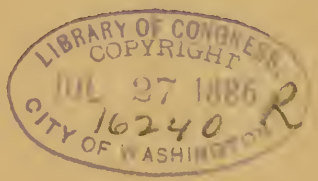
AND

OTHER POEMS,

BY

GRAHAM CLAYTOR,

Author of Pen Pictures of Farm Life and Other Poems.



J. W. RANDOLPH & ENGLISH,
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FROM THE PRESS OF
WM. ELLIS JONES,
RICHMOND, VA.

a. m. P., July 20, 1721

To

HIS MOTHER

This Little Volume

Is Affectionately Inscribed

By her Child,

THE AUTHOR.

*

PREFACE.

The kindly mention by the press, of a former volume of poems by the author, has encouraged him to a still further venture into the field of literature. If the descriptive poems in these pages have not that high order of merit the public demands, he believes they have at least the elements of truth.

THE AUTHOR.

Liberty, Va., May, 1886.

If thou art worn and hard beset
With sorrows, that thou wouldst forget,
If thou wouldst read a lesson, that will keep
Thy heart from fainting and thy soul from sleep,
Go to the woods and hills! No tears
Dim the sweet look that Nature wears.

H. W. Longfellow.

*

A MORN IN JUNE.

(From Bedford Hills.)

The world has laid its sable shroud away,
And clothed itself in morning's bright array,
And late, where solemn stillness waked a fear,
A hundred merry sounds break on the ear:
The gleesome lark, high poised in yon blue sky,
Pours forth a stream of sweetest melody—
The blue-bird pipes his tuneful lay along
To mingle with the robin's happy song.
Upon the freshened air a copious shower
Of mock-bird's music rains from yonder bower,
And field and wood and plain and valley fills,
And faintly dies along the distant hills.
The buzzing brown bees float upon the breeze,
Or sip the flowers, or hum among the trees,
While balmy South winds play a softened tune
Among the rustling leaves of fragrant June.

Amid the plains my native village lies,
Whose sun-tipped spires touch the bending skies,
Whose roofs ablaze in morning's glory shine
'Mid leafy aisles above the fragrant vine.
Now, hark! the bell, from yonder steeple high,
Is softly, sweetly sounding 'neath the sky—
And often have I heard the sacred sound
Along these hills and fields and woods resound.
I heard thy ringing music when a boy,
And, listening, hailed thy welcome notes with joy,
And now my heart with old time rapture swells
When listening to thy notes, sweet village bells.

Yon olden pike, upon whose flinty bed,
In other days, was heard the fiery tread
Of noble steed, when dashed the stage along—
To crack of whip and hostler's merry song—
Abandoned to its fate lies in the sun,
By rains deep washed, by weeds and grass o'errun;
And now the engine, screaming with its train,
Flies o'er the hills across the fertile plain.
The Inn, where wayworn travellers found a rest,

And hostlers drank their ale 'mid song and jest,
Lives but in name; too simple 'twas to please
The modern traveller's fond desire for ease;
Now in its stead a prouder structure stands,
And smiling clerks obey the guest's commands.

Aglow with life and light the landscape lies
Beneath the mellow gleam of sunny skies—
Far stretching hills, o'ertopped with verdure green,
Deep shady vales, with brooks that flow between,
And mile on mile a sea of forest trees
Sun-bathed and waving in the Southern breeze,
And bounded only by the azure blue,
Extends its length and breadth beneath the view.
Away to northward lofty mountains rise,
Whose everlasting peaks blend with the skies,
With clefts deep yawning, forest many a rood
In heights sublime, and vast in solitude.
From dark ravines a hundred gushing rills
In silver spray descend to lower hills,
Down lesser slopes, and through the meadows
gleam,

And mingle with the valley's larger stream.
How beautiful the lights and shadows blend,
On upland ways and o'er the vales extend;
The clouds of mist, low hovering o'er the streams,
Now disappear before the sun's full beams;
And sparkling waves, and many a ripple bright,
From babbling brooks, reflect the morning light.

From yonder valley, that to westward lies,
The market-town draws all its rich supplies:
Along the winding roads, beneath the green
Of shady groves, bright country homes are seen,
Before whose doors the merry children play
From early morn 'till close of Summer's day.
Here well filled barns bespeak a fertile soil,
And plenteous stores reward the sons of toil;
Here lowing herd upon the clover feed,
And neighing horses roam the grassy mead;
The uddered kine within the cowpen wait,
The tardy milkmaid lingering at the gate;
While yonder, 'neath the fruit tree's blossoming
boughs,

The fleecy fold upon the greensward browse;
The strutting cocks within the barnyard crow,
And schoolboys laugh to list the wild echo.

Ye dwellers 'mid these shades, why need ye roam
'Mid other climes? Around the humblest home,
Kind Nature, with a lavish hand, outpours
Her bounties here in undiminished stores;
For you the freshest airs from heaven blow,
And from the rills the purest waters flow.
Here's beauty in the land and in the skies,
A grandeur where the towering mountains rise,
A harvest in the meadows, on the hills,
And hope and strength and life to him who wills.

THE BIG BRANCH.

'Twas by that name we knew it best, the brook,
whose waters pour
In rippling waves across the farm, hard by the
homestead door;
From shady glens, from sylvan groves, adown the
wooded hills,
Of all the neighboring farms about, gush forth a
hundred rills,
Whose sparkling waters prattle on, until at length
they swell
Into the branch, the dear old branch, we loved in
youth so well.

A mighty stream we thought it then, the brook
that flows between
The verdant banks, the sunny slopes, the mea-
dows fresh and green;

And when the vernal showers fell, when came the gentle Spring,
And woods and fields were dressed in green, and birds began to sing,
With lightsome step and happy hearts we wandered by thy side,
And all the day, with hook and line, the angler's art we tried.

The windings of thy silver tide, from fountain head to main,
Familiar to our footsteps were, as windings of the lane;
We knew the shallows, knew the depth, for oft, with hook and line,
We fathomed every limpid pool beneath the circling vine;
And all the slopes and woodlands wild, the glens and cliffs along,
A thousand, thousand times gave back the echo of our song.

Still stands the olden beech, whose boughs above
the stream low bend,
Whose roots, in many a rugged turn, beneath the
waves extend;
'Twas here we found a shady nook, when noon-
tide heat oppressed,
A mossy bed by hidden brook, a sweet delicious
rest;
And here, upon the beechen bark, our names we
rudely traced,
Nor have the slow revolving years the letters yet
effaced.

And sweet it was thy banks to roam, or with
thy tide to run;
To sport along the golden sands, barefooted in
the sun;
To sit beside thy murmuring fall, in dreamy mu-
sings long,
And mingle with thy seething flood the snatches
of old song;

To gather berries on the cliffs, or stand on rocky ledge,
And watch the rolling stones down dash along the water's edge.

And when the evening sun declined, and lengthening shadows fell
Athwart the uplands and the meads, and down the quiet dell,
Reluctantly our footsteps ceased thy winding shore to roam,
And up the path, across the fields, our footsteps turned to home:
When hunger was appeased we slept, and as we slept, our dream
Was still a happy wandering along thy murmuring stream.

No more thy verdant banks along I wander as of old,
But 'mid the scenes of active life I toil for fame or gold;

And yet, methinks, when youth is past, or when
the eye grows dim,
And age hath silvered o'er my hair and weakened
every limb,
How sweet 'twill be to rest upon thy verdant
banks again,
And feel a touch of youthful joy course through
my every vein.

MY PARADISE.

One early morn, of Summer's day,
Upon my bed I restless lay—
I could not sleep the hours away.

The song of lark from crystal skies,
Bade me from out my bed arise
And view an earthly Paradise.

Across the verdant fields I strolled,
The morning mist had backward rolled
And showed a sky all flaming gold,

And trembling leaves and grassy blade,
And humblest flower that God had made,
In pearly drops of dew arrayed.

The thirsty sunbeams flashed and fell
O'er field and wood, adown the dell,
Kissed butter-cup and heather bell,

Drank pendant drops of silver dew
From "daisies pied" and pansies blue,
And clover bloom and tangled hue.

The magic hum of busy bees,
'Mid flowery beds and fragrant trees,
Lent music to the morning breeze.

From neighboring pines there came the sound
Of cawing crows assembled round,
In hot debate on themes profound.

The sparrows chirruped from the brush,
And warbling notes came from the thrush;
And from the mocking bird did gush

A stream of sweetest music: Now,
'Twas clear and wild; now, sad and low;
And now, it died a faint echo.

I wandered next to sylvan wood,
Where olden oaks in grandeur stood
In all their native solitude;

Yet not alone, for Nature here
Attunes her harp to anthem's clear,
That soothe the soul and please the ear.

The breezes blow, each leaf is stirred,
And softest, sweetest music's heard
Commingling with the song of bird.

From bough to bough the squirrel leapt,
The woodcock loud his drumming kept,
The owl in sullen silence slept.

The lizard skipped along the ground,
And from the tree-tops came the sound
Of thousand insects buzzing round.

Fresh was the air, and redolent
Of perfumes, sweet from flowers, bent
By honeyed dew, from Heaven sent.

O here was something sure to please,
For here was life in all the trees,
And here was hope on every breeze.

With careless tread and pensive mood,
I wandered on until I stood
Beside the brook that skirts the wood—

A modest stream it did appear,
With silver fountains, crystal clear,
And circling eddies here and there.

The fish beneath its waters played,
The birch-tree here its home had made,
The maple spread its cooling shade.

And here the ferns and mosses grew,
The cowslip and the daisy, too,
And reeds and rushes, not a few.

The weeping willow o'er it hung,
The lilies from its waters sprung,
And o'er the flags its spray was flung;

And mirrored in the glassy stream,
Bright amber-colored clouds did seem
To float away like poet's dream;

And as it gurgled 'neath the vine,
Its music mingled with the pine,
And song of bird in praise divine.

O swelling hills and valleys green!
O shady groves and sunlight sheen!
O laughing brooks and skies serene!

O beauteous landscape, wondrous bright!
In thee my soul finds sweet delight,
Here fancy takes her boldest flight.

Great Nature! as on thee we gaze,
What mighty Sculptor's hand we trace!
What startling wonders in thy face!

Yon tiny globe of silver dew,
That glistens in the sunlight hue,
Unfolds to man's deep piercing view

A world no human skill can vie,
Where mystery and beauty lie,
Where creatures live and move and die!

The bud, the bee,—the insect small,
The "people" of the sod that crawl
Or creep—great Nature's children, all!

The flowers that bloom from day to day,
The murmuring brook, the songster's lay,
The golden clouds that float away.

The fragrant air, the soft sunshine,
All, all, in harmony combine
To make a Paradise divine.

O, weary man, in need of rest,
O, burdened soul, by care oppressed,
I pray thee come, and here be blest:

From Nature, learn her simple ways.
How sweet she smiles; how she obeys,
And, smiling, gives to God the praise.

AUTUMN SCENE.

(In Piedmont Virginia.)

'Tis early morn, the village people scarce
Have turned from out their drowsy beds, and on
The grass the night dew lingers still. The moon
Has paled, and the last twinkling star gone out,
And from the East the glorious sun comes forth
In all his wonted majesty. Higher
And higher now, he mounts the unclouded sky,
And like some great electric lamp that swings
In heaven's blue, shoots forth his beams of light
O'er wood and dell, and grassy fen and field;
And through the moistened autumn foliage,
And down, far down, the gently sloping hill
By yonder stream that tinkles down the dell,
The lights and shadows intermingling fast,
A beauteous net-work form, and tiny globes
Of silver dew hang glistening in the sun;
And here and there along the wooded slope

The slowly reddening oak, the crimson gum
And maples, in their coats of gray and green,
Uplift their heads, while clust'ring hickory
And poplars, tall and grandly beautiful,
Intensely golden, pure and bright as that
From any mine, stand motionless; and now
The air on subtle wing begins to stir,
And from yon billowy sea of forest flash
A thousand quivering gleams of golden light,
While russet leaves turn upward to the skies
Their gorgeous colors to display. And now
From out the fragrant pine the wild bird pours
His mellow notes, and nimble squirrels leap
Where tallest hickories lift their golden boughs.
The tree-frog, deep in yonder wildwood croaks
His dismal song, and crickets chirrup from
The rocky field, and faint and far away
And sweet, the cowbell's clinkle comes upon
The morning air.

How fair the landscape lies!
The mellow haze of atmosphere doth cast

A sweet, delicious charm o'er every scene;
The rising breeze increasing, drives the mist
Of morning back, and far away upon
The mountain side "sweet fields of living green"
In bold outlines appear. There little homes,
Close nestling 'mid the trees, send up their wreaths
Of lazy smoke, as blue as heaven's vault
That bends above them—homes where quiet dwells,
And peace and simple joy; whose inmates, far
Removed above the bustling world, live on
In undisturbed repose; for earthly fame
Or mad ambition hath no charms for them.

Now briskly blow the breezes from the hills,
And every tree is audible. In quick
Succession lights and shadows flash athwart
The uplands, and the waving wildwood o'er
The plains springs into newer life.
How bright
And beautiful and fair doth Nature seem
On this autumnal morn! How pensive 'neath

The Autumn sky!—and ever changing, too!
New beauties rise, and thousand varying hues
Present new charms at every passing wind!

But who can paint thy marvellous beauty! O,
Thou great primeval forest? Or what art
Can catch thy thousand quivering forms of light
And shade—thy tints so delicate—in hours
Of storm—when tossed by playful winds, or calm
Beneath the mellow sheen of Autumn's sun?
Or who can breathe the music of thy dells,
Or catch the notes of warblers in thy trees?
No virtuoso of the Past, nor of
The living—none but Thou, O, God! yea, Thou,
And Thou alone, whose hand did'st fashion them!

How dear these walks and fields, these sylvan
woods,
O'er which in boyhood days I wandered much;
But then it was in thoughtless mood, and now
New beauties rise, and Nature speaks to me
In living language and harmonious sound.

Thy gifts are bounteous, pure; no hoarding here
Of treasures from the eye and mind of him
Who loves to revel in thy charms; no vile
Temptations lead astray, nor slanderous tongues
That poison as they speak. Thy paths lead on
To sparkling fountains where pure waters roll;
Thy groves, melodious with the song of birds,
Invite us to their shades, and purest airs
Waft sweetest odors and refreshing rest;
And elevated thought dwells in the heart,
And pure desires rise within the soul
Of him who dwells in sweet communion here
With Nature and with Nature's God.

A WINTER PIECE.

At noon the wind blew from the west,
 At eve it veered around,
And from the north the keenest blast
 Swept o'er the frozen ground.
Faint shone the sun from leaden skies,
 Then sunk behind the hill,
The night came down, the winds were hushed,
 The frosty air was still.

The fire blazed, the embers glowed,
 A faint breeze shook the door,
The clock upon the mantle clicked,
 And louder than before;
At every step the stairway creaked,
 Distinct and clear without
The footfalls' echoing sounds were heard—
 The keen and lusty shout.

And now there came a rustling noise,
Softer than falling leaves;
It swept along the mossy roof,
Adown the shingled eaves,
Anon the footfalls died away,
And all was still again
Save when the wing of wandering bird
Beat on the window pane.

Now day-dawn peeps above the hills—
A wondrous change perceive!
I look upon another world
Than that of yester eve;
Now all the fields are grandly clad
In robes of spotless white,
And every path, familiar once,
Is lost to human sight!

For while I slept the snow-drops fell
Like down upon the hill,
A crystal barrier round each door,
A fringe on window sill;

A crown of white for clustering boughs
Of cedar and of pine,
A winding sheet for frozen stream,
A cloak for tender vine.

When burst the sunlight through the clouds,
And shot athwart the wood,
A thousand brilliants decked the trees
That in the forest stood.
Than polished marble, brighter far,
Gleamed every foot of land,
In Spring, me thought the world so fair,
But now—the world was grand!

A MODEL FOR MY LIFE.

"Take not the stars, for they fly without ceasing; nor the ocean that ebbs and flows; nor the river that cannot stay; but let it be like summer air, which has its times of noble energy and times of perfect peace."—*Hamerton's Intellectual Life.*

A model for my life; ah, what would I
Of all that is of earth, or sea, or sky;
O, not the stars, they fly unceasingly
Thro' endless space and thro' eternity;
Nor yet the ocean, for its restless roar
Is silent never on the boundless shore;
Nor yet the river, for it never stays,
But winds and ever winds thro' devious ways;
But rather let it be the summer air,
That wooes to life and light a world so fair,
That frisks and laughs in ripples o'er the lakes,
And 'mid the groves a gentle music makes;
That thro' the rip'ning corn on upland sweeps,
Or murmurs in the pines, or softly sleeps

Within the forest deep, embowering shade;
And thus my life, just like the summer air,
Its hours of noble energy would share,
Though oftimes weary worn, yet oftimes blest
With hours of peaceful calm and perfect rest.

Other Poems.

THE OLD YEAR AND THE NEW.

(1885.)

Dead is the Old Year!
As silently as leaves in the Autumn fall;
As silently as ivy creeps over the wall;
As flowers that sleep at the closing of day,
So silently passed the Old Year away.

At mid-night it died,
And how did we part? O, was it with weeping?
When its fires died out, perchance we were sleeping,
Unconscious of Time's slow measureless tread—
Unconscious the Old Year lay silent and dead.

Gone is the Old Year!
Gone are its moments we eagerly sought,
Gone are its battles we earnestly fought.

Did we win? Did we lose? What matters it now,
To the fate of the past submissively bow.

Born is the New Year!
Out of the Old and into the New,
Out of the Past, the Future to view;
Out of its pleasures, its woes and its pain,
New hopes and new pleasures, new sorrows to gain.

Hail to the glad New Year,
And mourn not the Old—its pleasures have flown;
O grieve not its failures, but leave them alone;
Go forth to battle for the good and the true,
The failures of the Old amend with the New.

MARION.

Come, tell me, Marion,
My merry Marion,
Whence these bright eyes, that prattling tongue?
Who round thy neck these ringlets hung?
Who painted roses on thy cheek?
Who made thy voice like music speak?
My cherub Marion?

Who greets me first at dawn?
My merry Marion.
When tired and worn I come at night,
Whose heart is glad, whose face is bright?
Who leaves her dolls my knees to climb,
Whose little arms my neck entwine?
My angel Marion.

Whose love is pure, unfeigned,
By earthly dross unstained?
Whose mind's just in its budding hour,
Whose love is as the full-blown flower?
Within whose pure, untainted breast
No evil thought e'er dared to rest?
My baby Marion.

Thou romping, merry child,
What transports, joyous, wild,
Attend thee all the live-long day!
Dost never tire, my child, of play?
Not 'till the sun is in his bed,
Not 'till the evening lights are fled,
Doth sleep my Marion.

ORIGIN OF JACK-O'-LANTERN.

(A Ballad.*)

The night is dark, the rain it pours,
 Come in and shut the door,
And listen, children, while I tell
 This tale I heard of yore:

A village smith there once did live—
 A man so very queer—
Who worked but little at his trade,
 And frolicked half the year.

At early dawn on Monday morn
 He got upon his spree,
And all the week he danced and pranced
 Like one in merriest glee;

*Founded upon the story as told by the author of Uncle Remus.

Nor did he stop next Monday morn,
But started out as bad,
And all the week he drank and drank,
Until the man was mad.

And by and by, one day when he
Had cursed and spreed around,
He heard a curious, rustling noise,
And then a stranger sound.

With maddened strength he dashed the cup
In pieces on the floor,
And wildly staggered 'cross the room,
And opened wide the door.

There stood old Nick, with fiery eyes,
Fresh from that dreadful place
Where man, though dying, never dies,
And torments never cease.

"My ever faithful friend," quoth Nick,
"On earth thou'st served me well,

But now thy service here must end,
I've need of thee in hell."

In pitying tones poor smithy begged
Old Nick would spare him here,
To serve him with his might and main
Just for another year.

Then said Old Nick, "I'll grant thy boon
If thou wilt now agree
That when the coming year shalt end
To pledge thy soul to me."

* * * *

And then he charmed the smithy's chair,
That who'er took a seat
Was subject to the smithy's will,
And in his power complete.

And o'er his great sledge hammer, too,
He tried his potent skill;
Who took it up ne'er let it down
But by the master's will.

He flung the smith a bag of coin,
And said, "Go fill the bowl;
Have all the fun thou canst this year,
And next, I'll have thy soul."

The blacksmith now, with might and main,
Set in to have his fun;
He had so much he e'en forgot
The year its course had run,

'Till by and by, one day he heard
A rustling at his door,
And now he knew his time was out—
Old Nick had come once more.

And in he walked without a word,
But smithy hammered long,
And made the sparks fly right and left,
And sang his merriest song.

Up spoke Old Nick; quoth he, "My friend,
I cannot tarry here;

So come with me, I've use for thee
Within some other sphere."

"One moment, sir," the smith replied,
"But pray you take a seat;
And, when I've done this little job,
I'll follow at thy feet."

Into the chair—the conjured chair!
Old Nick sat down at last;
But when he tried to rise again,
The chair it held him fast!

Now smithy cracked his heels and laughed,
And rubbed his horny palm;
And asked Old Nick, in jest, if he
Would join him in a dram.

"Thou canst not move one peg," quoth smith,
"I have thee safely here,
Nor will I let thee up, unless
Thou'lt grant me one more year."

"I'll grant thee, then, another year,"
Old Nick did make reply,
When up he rose from out the chair
And bade the smithy good-bye.

And swiftly passed that year around
In drunkenness and sin,
And when the appointed time was come
Old Nick walked boldly in.

"I'll soon be ready," quoth the smith,
"First, let me mend this wedge;
And would Old Nick be kind enough
To help him with the sledge?"

"O, yes," cried Nick, "I'll try my hand,
And strike a lick or so;"
With this he grasped the conjured sledge!
Nor could he let it go!

Again the blacksmith clapped his hands,
O'erjoyed at his own skill;

Once more he had Old Nick all fast
And subject to his will.

"Thou canst not let that hammer go,"
Quoth he, in merriest glee;
"But if thou'lt grant me *one* more year,
Again thou shalt be free."

"Then take," quoth Nick, "another year,
But this shalt be thy last,
For when this year shall run its course
I'll surely hold thee fast."

With this he loosed his iron grasp,
And bade the smith farewell,
And walked in sullen silence back
Toward the gates of hell.

Now smithy made the welkin ring
With frolic and with fun,
And month on month he drank his fill
Until the year was done.

Then came Old Nick, all in hot haste,
And eager for his man;
Poor smithy now had no excuse,
So up he jumped and ran.

And as he ran he screamed and howled
And begged most piteously
For one more year, or month, or day,
Of life and liberty.

But Nick soon seized him by the neck,
Then threw him on his back,
And rolled his body in a heap
And stuffed it in his sack.

He tied it up, he thought, secure,
Then took the heavy load,
Across his shoulders flung its weight,
And sauntered down the road.

* * * * *

Now all this happened, you must know,
Upon a muster day,

When all the neighboring folk turn out
In all their bright array.

Old Nick joined with the gathering throng,
With halt and blind and lame,
On mischief bent—with foul intent
To bag some other game;

And when he reached the muster ground,
He placed his loaded sack
Beneath the table, then sat down
To eat his frugal snack.

And now the smith creeped slyly out
And filled the sack anew;
Then hied he to the forest deep
'Till safe from Devil's view.

And when Old Nick did eat his fill
He gathered up his load,
And bade the people all good-day
And sauntered down the road.

And when at last he reached his home
His children gathered round;
He ope'd the sack—when lo! out jumped
A fierce and furious hound.

And grappling with the imps of hell,
He shook them all about,
Until Old Nick ope'd wide the door
And turned the rascal out.

* * * * *

Now time rolled on, poor smithy died,
And straight to Heaven's gate
His spirit fled for entrance there;
The angel cried, "Too late!"

And then adown it winged its way
And tried the gates of hell;
But when Old Nick peeped thro' the bars,
He knew the blacksmith well.

He shook his head, "O no," quoth Nick,
"I know thee, sir, of yore;

Go somewhere else to play thy pranks;"
With this he slammed the door.

Shut out from Heaven's golden streets,
And spurned away from hell,
Poor smithy's spirit wanders forth
O'er bog and fen and dell.

And when the night is dark and damp
His lantern shoots its ray
From out the bog and fen and dell
To lure us from our way;
And Jack-o'-Lantern it is called
Unto this very day.

ODENWALL.

NOTE.

The following poem is a reproduction, in verse, of Washington Irving's story, entitled "The Spectre Bridegroom." The author has changed some names; something omitted and something added, as fancy dictated.

ODENWALL.

PART FIRST.

The Summer's sun had sunk to rest
Behind the mountain's lofty crest;
The hunter's horn was heard to call
Around the cliffs of Odenwall;
The evening breezes gently stirred,
And mellowed every whispered word;
And southern moon rose large and bright
And flooded all with silver light,
As down the smooth and even tide
Of classic Rhine our bark did glide.

We passed along by cliffs so bold,
By lonely glens and castles old,
And long we gazed on mountain's height,
On waters smooth, on stars so bright;

On cliffs so grand, on castles high,
Which ever live in poesy;
And much we talked of legends old,
Which oft have been by poets told
O'er things so long since passed away,
And live alone in poet's lay.

Upon our bark an old man stood,
Who gazed around in thoughtful mood;
Whose form so bent, whose locks so gray,
Showed he had lived through many a day.
The cane he held he lifted high
And seemed to point it toward the sky;
Across his brow there passed a smile,
And thus the old man spoke the while:

"O, travellers, see yon castle old
That stands upon yon cliff so bold?
Its name and fame I know you all
Have often heard—'tis Odenwall;

About yon castle, old and drear,
I know a tale so strange and queer;
And as adown the stream we glide,
Upon its smooth and silvery tide,
I'll tell it you the best I can
If you will list an old man's strain."

O, gladly would we sit and hear
This old man's tale, so strange and queer,
For long we wished to know it all,
And what he knew of Odenwall.
We found for him a cozy seat,
And gathered 'round his aged feet;
He cast his eyes on all around,
And then there was a lull profound;
Well pleased now, smiled the grayhaired man,
And thus his favorite tale began:

"O, in those walls so lonely now,
There once was heard the lover's vow;

There once we list the harp's wild ring
To sweetest words that poets sing!
And now, alas! how changed is all!
The sparrows build within the wall;
The night hawk's scream is heard to ring
Where welcome bards were wont to sing.
The beach-tree now doth stand so lone,
The fir sends forth its solemn moan,
The moon's pale ray doth light the way
Where once were seen the blithe and gay.

"Within yon castle once did dwell
A man who loved his country well;
Whose heart beat high when her good name
Was haloed round with wreaths of fame,
And when the foe would dash along
With gleaming sword and armor strong,
He quickly left his castle wall
In answer to the tocsin's call—

'Twas then that Baron Von Landshort
For home and friends and country fought.

"In yonder walls, so dark and dim,
The Baron's daughter dwelt with him—
A maiden young, with lovely face,
With form possessed of every grace;
A face more fair than her's, I ween,
Within those walls was never seen;
Her beauty, like the lily's, won
The praise of all it shone upon;
And when her hand swept o'er the lute
Long listened all with rapture mute.
Her mellow voice, or sad or gay
Twixt smiles and tears poured forth its lay.

"Two spinster aunts, with searching care,
Watched close around this maiden fair,
Their task it was to point the way
Where this fair maiden could not stray;

And that no handsome cavalier
Should be allowed to linger near,
They taught her to distrust them all
When at her feet they fain would fall,
And thus she lived, her love unwooed,
Until she grew to womanhood.

"And now the Baron must decide
Who'd claim her for his destined bride;
The Count of Atlenburg, he said,
That Count should his fair daughter wed;
And thus, a house well known to fame
He would unite with his in name.

"Hard by, in yonder forest wood,
Another famous castle stood;
Here lived old Starkenfaust so stern,
Within whose heart there long did burn
A deadly hatred for them all
Who dwelt at Castle Odenwall.

Each's grandsire thought the other wrong.
And thus a feud was kindled long
For generations then unborn.

"Now Starkenfaust had sternly said,
Than see his son a Landshort wed
He'd see him numbered with the dead;
And old Landshort as sternly vowed,
He'd see his daughter wrapt in shroud
Ere he should be so false or base
As wed her with that recreant race.

"And now at last the hour was come
To Odenwall's bright, happy home—
The hour in which the Baron said,
His daughter fair, the Count should wed.

"That morn the Baron fumed about
With many a loud and angry shout,
As fast he worked with all his might

In preparations for the night;
And castle walls were filled that night,
With many maidens fair and bright,
Whose pealing laughter, loud and long,
Commingled with the happy throng.

"The destined bride was very fair—
O she was decked with every care—
A rosy blush suffused her face,
And in her mien was every grace;
Her snowy bosom gently sighed
As she stood forth almost a bride.

"The fatted calf in time was killed,
The polished tables ready filled,
The forest wild rang loud and long
With shouts of joy and huntsman's song;
The wine from out the cellars came
All things were ready, but—for shame!
That tardy groom—where could he be?

The Baron now must go and see;
For long they all had ready been
To welcome him they ne'er had seen.

"The hour came, but not the groom,
No tidings yet, now all was gloom;
Still anxious hearts for day dawn waited,
At dawn will come the groom belated.
The day dawn came, he lingered still,
The Baron gazed far o'er the hill
To catch his form—he was not near—
Now every guest was filled with fear.

"They waited 'till the day was done,
They waited 'till the sinking sun
Had drawn his rays behind the tall
And graceful trees of Odenwall.

"The Baron mounted high upon
Yon loftiest tower and watched the sun

Whose lingering rays sunk their last dart,
Like fading hopes within his heart;
The flitting bats flew thwart his face,
The road he could no longer trace,
And through the dark could nothing spy
Save some lone peasant lagging by;
With heavy heart he walked below
To witness there a scene of woe.

ODENWALL.

PART SECOND.

"With smiling face, the Count that morn,
On trusty steed, moved slowly on
The road that leads o'er mountains tall
And toward the Castle Odenwall.
He cast his eyes far o'er the plain
And saw a horseman draw his rein,
Just on the edge of forest wood,
And turning drew where horseman stood,
And as the Count still nearer drew
The stranger form turned full to view.

"How great, indeed, was his surprise,
When in the road before his eyes
Herman Von Starkenfaust sat there,
High-mounted on his dark bay mare.

"This son of Landshort's hated foe
The Count had often seen before;
For, side by side, on battlefield
They oft had been each other's shield;
And in the cold bivouac of night,
Or in the battle's hottest fight,
They'd ever been, and still remained,
In bond of friendship strong enchained.

"Long years had passed since they had stood
Thus face to face, and in this wood,
In recognition warm, they pressed
Each other's hand—each other blessed,
As when they met on battlefield
Their country's honored name to shield.

"'Which road, friend Herman, do you take?'
'The same that leads by yonder lake,
And through the glen o'er mountains tall,
And hard by Landshort's Castle wall.'

Replied the Count, 'The same that I
Shall travel o'er,—then let us try
To make the lonely hours roll fast
In talking o'er the glorious past.'

"'Twas thus these friends rode slowly on,
They talked of things long past and gone,
Of battles fought, of love and home,
Of pleasures spent, of joys to come.
The count talked much of his fair bride,
The bride whose face he ne'er had seen,
But he'd been told her beauty vied
With lovel'est maid that e'er had been.

"The road the Count was on that day
Leads o'er a rough and lonely way,
By towering mount, through darksome glen,
Where live and thrive a race of men
Who ply their trade when no one's eye
Can well their darksome deeds espy.

They traveled on, the lake they passed,
The forest deep they reach at last.
In close converse they still engage,
Until they reach the mountain's edge.

"The rugged road begins to rise,
And up they go, till 'neath their eyes
The lovely world of nature lies
In sparkling grandeur 'neath the skies;
The winding road now turns again,
To yonder dark and lonely glen,
And lower, lower still they go
Until they reach the glen below.

"The travellers pause—the mountains high,
Whose tops seem blended with the sky,
Stand round like sullen sentinels,
While sparkling rills beat through the dells;
O'er rocks they dash with gurgling sound,
And with a splash o'er falls they bound,

And ever murmuring, on they pour,
'Till lost amid old ocean's roar.

"The horses snuff the air around,
And with impatience paw the ground;
With ears erect about they spy,
As if they feared the banditti;
The rustling leaves send forth a sound—
A stranger noise is heard around—
A blast! a shout! a gleaming sword!
And then the forest loudly roared
With angry threats from that vile horde,
As out the forest fast they poured;
No chance was left for them to fly—
'Twas braver far to fight and die.

"O furious was the dire attack—
In numbers much the count did lack
Yet still his trusty sword he drew—
It gleamed on high and quickly slew

The foremost of the van. Again
They rush with fury out the glen,
And gathering round with hideous yell,
The luckless count to earth they fell.

"But Herman bold did well his part;
His trusty sword pierced to the heart
Of more than one of that vile horde,
As fast they pressed around with sword
High-lifted o'er his gallant head,
And Herman bold had soon been dead,
Had not the count's whole retinue
Rushed boldly up to his rescue;
At this, fast fled the reckless band,
And left brave Herman sword in hand.

"The count lay stretched upon the ground,
Within his side a fearful wound
Showed, ere the western sun was low,
He, to the spirit-world must go.

"The dying man called to his friend;
'My days,' he said, 'are at an end,
Yet ere my body's laid at rest
I make of thee this one request
O go this night to Odenwall;
O go, I pray and tell her all!
O tell my fair and lovely bride
How 'twas her ardent lover died!
Unless thou dost this promise keep,
Within my grave I'll never sleep!'

"With this his quivering eyelids closed,
He seemed in sweetest rest reposed;
He gently drew a last long breath
And fell asleep—asleep in death.

"Poor Starkenfaust bestowed a sigh,
As soldiers do when comrades die;
He dropt a tear, he kissed his brow
And swore to keep his solemn vow.

At Wurtzburg then a grave was made
And there his friend's remains were laid.

"With heavy heart, that fated morn,
Poor Starkenfaust rode slowly on
Through darksome glen, o'er mountains tall,
And toward the bride at Odenwall.
O hard indeed was that request,
For there he was no bidden guest;
A hostile people he must see,
And damp their gay festivity
With fatal tidings of their guest—
O hard indeed was that request.

"The hour was late at Odenwall;
No sound of mirth was in the hall;
The Baron paced his lonely room,
And wondered why the tardy groom
Should linger on the road so long
And thus make sad a happy throng.

But now a blast is heard without
The Baron turned—he looked about,
Another blast, 'twas loud and long,
And echoed through the saddened throng,
'Raise ye the song and gladsome shout!'
The Baron cried—'the Count's without!'
Quick fell the drawbridge to the ground,
Forth came the Baron with a bound
And stood before the castle gate
To chide the groom for being late;
And then he thought 'twould be but best
To welcome warm his tardy guest.

"'I'm sorry, sir,' the stranger said,
But here the Baron shook his head,
'O, sir I pardon thee this wrong,
Get down, the guests have waited long
To greet thee here with cheer and song!'
'Twas twice the stranger tried to tell

The Baron what the Count befell,
But all in vain—he bowed his head
And followed where the Baron led.

"In all his dignity and pride
The Baron now led forth the bride,
A moment did the stranger gaze
Upon her lovely blushing face
And as he gazed his soul was moved
For now the *Count's* betrothed *he* loved.

"Again was joy at Odenwall;
Again was mirth within each hall;
Again the harp's wild chords were rung;
Again the sweetest songs were sung.

"But midst the burst of revelry,
The stranger guest with saddened eye,
That spoke a mind but ill at ease,
Looked on the crowd that tried to please,

But still they failed unto the last;
His face assumed a deeper cast,
And stranger still it may appear
The Baron's jokes he did not hear.
Alone he talked to that fair bride,
Who sat in silence by his side
And listened to each whispered word
By all around save her unheard.

"He spoke in words of tenderness
To his fair blushing auditress;
But when his eye was turned away
And towards the wedding guests so gay
She'd quickly steal a sidelong glance
At his romantic countenance.

"The Baron's best and richest joke
Could not a single smile provoke
Upon the face of this strange guest,
For oft he thought of that request.

The songs grew less and less apace,
Forebodings strange came o'er each face,
The conversation died away,
Now marvel stillness held its sway;
The stranger rose and heaved a sigh
And looked around with wondering eye,
'My friends,' he said, 'I greatly grieve
That I must now the castle leave.'
'What! leave us now,' the Baron said,
'We have prepared for thee a bed;
Thy plighted troth but waits thy vow,
Then why, dear Count, why leave us now?'

"The mournful stranger shook his head,
He must go find some other bed;
A different chamber must enclose
His weary limbs ere morning rose.
Before the light of coming day
He must to Wurtzburg haste away.

'To-morrow, wait!' the Baron cried,
'To-morrow thou shalt take thy bride!'

"'The bride! no! no! I cannot stay,
I'm dead! yes, *dead*, and must away.
Last eve I was by robbers slain,
And out all night my body's lain;
At Wurtzburg now my grave is made,
And there my body must be laid!'
His horse he mounts, away did dash,
Went o'er the drawbridge with a crash;
And 'mid the whistling blasts of night
The stranger form was lost to sight!

ODENWALL.

PART THIRD.

" The chime of bells from Oden's tower
Rang out the midnight's solemn hour;
The hour when darkness fills the air
And hovers o'er a world of care;
When forest, mountain, plain, and hill,
And every laughing, sparkling rill
Are bathed in the stars' faint twinkling light,
It was the zenith of the night,
The hour when spirits hand in hand
In weird forms move o'er the land,
When earth's poor weary sons forget,
In slumber sweet, life's toil and fret.

" O in that hour at Odenwall
No song was heard within the hall,

For at that hour the stranger guest
Left bride and Baron sore distressed.
Amazement stood on every face,
And sadness reigned within the place
Where late was heard the gladsome shout
Of joy within and joy without.
The minstrel ceased his song to pour,
The bride fell prostrate on the floor.

"The maiden aunts swooned with affright;
They feared he was some wandering sprite;
Some thought perchance this was the man
Who heads a wild and famous band,
That roams the mountains wild at night,
The children young and maids to fright;
While others thought that in this way
Some sportive trick he thought to play,
And that the handsome cavalier
Would in the hall again appear,

"But every doubt was cast away
By news so strange that came next day:
It told them that the Count was dead,
And died as this strange guest had said;
The grave at Wurtzburg had been made
And there the Count's remains were laid.

"O in the castle was dismay,
And sad the Baron's heart that day;
Alone he sat like one bereaved,
In moody silence long he grieved;
He would not let his anxious guest
Come near to soothe his soul distressed;
They wandered 'round the castle wall—
In groups they gathered in the hall.

"But O how sad the widowed bride;
She wished that she had long since died,
Than to have lived through such a scene,

Or to have felt this sorrow keen;
She'd lost a husband that she knew
She could have loved so fondly true—
Had lost him ere her throbbing heart
Had told him all it would impart—
Had lost him ere her head could rest
Upon his noble, manly breast;
And if the spectre could have been
So good and noble as to win
Her heart within that single hour
What would have been the husband's power?

"Two nights had passed since that strange guest
Left bride and Baron sore distressed;
The weeping bride sat in her room
And watched the twilight's lengthening gloom;
Calm sleep could not her eyelids close,
For her there was no sweet repose,

But frightful dreams and shadowy sights
Were haunting her through all the nights.

"The chamber which was occupied
By maiden aunt and widowed bride,
O'erlooks a forest, wild and strange,
Where owlets hoot and wild deer range;
But just beneath the window's seen
A garden filled with evergreen—
With blooming roses, rich and rare,
With clustering pinks and lilys fair,
With sweet perfumes from eglantine,
Whose tendrils round the window twine.

"The pensive bride, bereaved of love,
Lay gazing on the stars above,
In milk-a-way that spans the skies
With myriad lights, like myriad eyes.

The placid moonbeams cheered the gloom,
Danced on the window, through the room,
And silvered o'er the aspen leaves
That gently trembled in the breeze.
As midnight's clock chimed on the air
And waked the wild deer from his lair,
There came a strain of music light,
Borne on the rich perfumes of night,
And through her window softly stole,
'And swayed awhile her raptured soul.'
From out her bed she lightly stepped,
And to the window softly crept;
She gazed far o'er the garden wall,
And saw beneath the trees so tall,
A figure mid the shades of night.
It raised its head, a beam of light
Fell 'thwart its face—O earth and air!
The spectre groom was standing there!

"A shriek now burst upon her ear,
That filled her very soul with fear,
She turned and looked about the room
The cause she saw—the spectre groom
Had filled her aunt with dread alarms,
Who, fainting, fell within her arms.
Again she looked out in the night
And there she saw the moon's pale light,
The starry heavens, the lonely trees,
And shadowy forms amid the breeze;
But spectre groom away had flown,
And left the widowed bride alone!

"The maiden aunt declared next day
That she would now no longer stay
Within a chamber where a sprite
Might visit her on any night;
The niece declared that she would keep
Her chamber still, and there would sleep

For now her lover's guardian shade
Had near her room its bower made;
And while her form was wrapt in sleep,
'Twould there its nightly vigils keep.

"The weeks flew by. At Odenwall
The kindly guests had ceased to call.
The Baron left his lonely room,
The Baron soon dispelled his gloom;
The maiden aunt forgot the night
On which she saw the wandering sprite;
And widowed bride with smiling face
Was seen in her accustomed place.

"And thus the time sped swiftly on,
When suddenly one lovely morn,
The bride was missed at breakfast hour,
They searched each hall and every tower,
She was not found; her door they knocked,

'Twas closely barred, securely locked.
With frantic force, the Baron tore
The bars away and ope'd the door,
A lonely room! an empty bed!
Alas! alas! the bride had fled!

"'The Spectre!' loud the Baron cried,
'O, he hath carried off the bride!
O, he hath robbed me of my child,
To live with him in mountains wild!
Or else, this wandering spectre groom
Hath buried her within the tomb,
And dead to me she'll ever be—
O, what hath caused such misery!'

"O, sad was that fond father then;
He moved to tears the boldest men;
His lamentations filled the air,
And, humbled on his knees in prayer,

He asked the God of Love to save
His child from such an awful grave!

"And now the servants with affright
Told of strange sounds they heard that night;
Some said they heard long after dark
The watch-dog's loud and angry bark,
And others heard a clattering sound
Of horse's hoofs upon the ground.
They had no doubt 'twas then the bride
Was carried down the mountain side
By that bold wandering spectre groom
Who bore her to his lonely tomb!

"The Baron ordered his best men
To mount, to horse, and scour each glen,
And every path and every road,
And find the spectre's dark abode;
The Baron, too, that fateful morn,

His trusty sword was girding on
To lend to them his feeble aid,
In hasty search for that fair maid,
When, wrapt in wonder, all stood still
And gazed at something o'er the hill,
That came that way—it nearer drew,
The Baron now his *daughter* knew;
She came in fashion like a bride
The spectre groom rode by her side!

"Now quickly leaped she to the ground
And threw her lovely arms around
Her father's neck, and kissed his brow;
And then the spectre told him how
He tried in vain to tell him all
The night he came to Odenwall—
How that whene'er he tried to tell
What 'twas Count Altenburg befell,
The Baron shook his hoary head

And would not hear one word he said;
How when he met the maiden fair
He fell in love right then and there;
How he had wooed—had won—in short
How he had made her his consort.

"'But who are you,' the Baron cried,
'That made *my* daughter fair your bride?'
'I would have told thee long before
But years long past my father swore
Than see his son a Landshort wed
He'd see him numbered with the dead;
And you Landshort as sternly vowed
You'd see your daughter wrapt in shroud
Ere you should be so false or base
As wed her with *my* recreant race;
And *this* is why I'd never call
In my own name at Odenwall;
And now, O Baron, 'neath these trees

We fall upon our bended knees,
And while in heaven's pure smiles we bask,
Thy blessing we would humbly ask.'

"The Baron's joy was now so high
At finding his lost daughter nigh
And that she had escaped the doom
Of what he thought a spectre's tomb,
He freely pardoned them and shed
A shower of blessings on each head.

"Again was joy at Odenwall,
Again was mirth within each hall,
Again was heard the harp's wild ring
To sweetest words that poets sing."

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